Reviewer’s report

Title: Job satisfaction and retention of healthcare providers: a cross sectional study in Afghanistan and Malawi

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Reviewer: Anita Bercovitz

Reviewer’s report:

This is an interesting paper. I have a few suggestions and areas for clarification.

Major Compulsory Revisions

None

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Methods – Sample and data collection - What was the refusal rate for participation – i.e. of those approached how many responded? Depending on the answer to this, could there be some effect on the results based on who ended up participating?

2. Methods – Sample and data collection - If I understood correctly, in Afghanistan participants were recruited from 32 unique facilities, compared with 10 in Malawi. Could resource and facility-associated factors play a larger role in Malawi than Afghanistan, because there would be more providers clustered in fewer facilities (and these would share similar characteristics)?

3. Methods – Statistical Analyses - Why was age continuous for Afghanistan and dichotomous for Malawi?

4. Methods – Statistical Analyses - Why was the cutoff for years at the facility set at 2? Was there a conceptual reason (e.g. most turnover occurs within first 2 years) or a statistical one (e.g. enough in each group).

5. Methods – Statistical Analyses - Where are the bivariate comparisons between the two countries reported? (Is this Table 1 – not all the variables are included there.)

6. Results - I did not see the distribution of job satisfaction and intent to stay in Table 1. The distribution of these variables could be presented in a separate table, but would be useful to know, regardless of where they are presented. (What was “internal reliability for work environments” ? Results – paragraph 1)

7. Results - In Table 1 the percent distribution for marital status for Malawi appears to be off (% sums to more than 100).

8. Results - What was the distribution of responses to the study questionnaire before consolidation by factor analysis?

9. Results - What was the distribution of responses after factor analysis?

10. Results - For the dependent variables did the final combined job satisfaction
variable have a range of 1 to 20 and the intent to leave have distribution of 1 to 15? Could the final distribution of these variables be presented?

11. Results - How were the variables included in the regression chosen? While for some it is obvious (exclusion of gender for Afghanistan), for others it wasn’t so clear to me. For example, why wasn’t marital status included? Because of low bivariate correlations? Why was cadre included but not type of facility? (While in Malawi all were hospitals, in Afghanistan it seems almost half were health centers.)

Discretionary Revisions

12. In the Background please provide more references in the first few paragraphs in case the reader wants to follow-up.

13. Methods – Measures - Could the Workplace Climate and Job Satisfaction Survey be attached as supplemental material? Being able to see the questions used to generate the independent and control variables would help in understanding the concepts addressed, especially since these questions were then combined through the factor analysis.

14. Results - Were there any significant differences in the distribution of the variables in Table 1 between Afghanistan and Malawi? (age, marital status, having young children and travel time seem the most easily compared.) In the discussion they are described as demographically similar.

15. Results - I found it interesting that ‘received salary on due date’ fell in with training opportunities rather than with ‘being paid an appropriate salary’. Why do you think this is?

16. Discussion- In paragraph 4, I assume the associations are the ones shown in Table 2. However, I found it a bit confusing when the variables discussed in the text (compensation and professional development) were different from what was in the table. Is professional development part of the aggregated ‘training’ variable?

17. Discussion - Similar to the comment above, in paragraph 5 the use of variable names which were not presented individually in the results (only as an aggregated construct) was confusing. (e.g. “received constructive feedback or recognition for doing good work” which I believe were rolled up into the “recognition” construct.)

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.